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Times Union

## **Water-use blood tests still on hold by N.Y. Health Department**

### **Rensselaer County residents continue waiting**

By Brendan J. Lyons

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Albany

The state Health Department is continuing to withhold the results of blood samples taken four months ago from hundreds of Rensselaer County residents who were exposed to a toxic chemical that contaminated public water supplies in Hoosick Falls and Petersburg.

The sampling began after a Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics plant in the village of Hoosick Falls was declared a state Superfund site because state officials said the company's McCaffrey Street plant was suspected of contaminating public water supplies with perfluorooctanoic acid or PFOA, which was used in manufacturing at the facility for decades.

#### **More Information**

Richard Azzopardi, a spokesman for Gov. Andrew Cuomo, said the release of the blood tests is pending and that it has been an involved process.

State officials initially said the blood-sample results were going to be mailed to residents beginning last week. But the plan was delayed as the agency has internally debated how much additional background medical information to include with the test results. The agency also has consulted with local doctors whose patients had their blood tested and may reach out to their physicians for guidance.

Three years ago, a science panel released the results of a multiyear study that examined PFOA exposure and health risks in several Ohio Valley communities, where PFOA, also known as C8, was emitted since the 1950s from a manufacturing plant in Parkersburg, W. Va. The study found probable links between PFOA exposure and high cholesterol, ulcerative colitis, thyroid disease, testicular cancer, kidney cancer and pregnancy-induced hypertension.

In Hoosick Falls, many residents said they believe the village has endured a higher-than-normal rate of thyroid disease and rare cancers, although there has not been a long-term study on the community's health problems.

Recently, an official with the Health Department's Center for Environmental Health told a county

resident that the blood-sample results were ready to be mailed out but the agency has been blocked from sending out the results as they came back from the laboratory that did the testing. The resident taped the conversation with the agency official, but asked that the state employee not be identified because of concern the person could face retribution at work.

"We have a commissioner but he reports to the governor so our actual approvals to get these letters out and to tell people the results ... the buck stops with the governor's office," the Health Department official said during the conversation. "It's my managers that talk to the governor's office but we work with the people that are in the governor's office that basically manage (us)."

Richard Azzopardi, a spokesman for Gov. Andrew Cuomo, said the release of the blood tests is pending and that it has been an involved process.

"At the governor's direction, the Department of Health has undertaken a comprehensive blood testing program in Hoosick Falls for any interested resident," he said. "We've been informed that the analysis of more than 2,000 blood samples and patient histories is almost ready to be mailed to residents and – as we've made clear – DOH will be sending them out the moment they're finalized. We expect this to happen in the coming days."

A state official familiar with the work said the Health Department also has been working to include additional background materials on PFOA in the mailings so that residents will have a broader understanding of what their test results may mean. The mailings may also include "comparison information so they can see how their levels compare to people in other communities who have PFOA in their water," according to the Health Department official whose conversation with a resident was recorded.

A spokesman for the state Health Department did not immediately for comment late Wednesday.

The state began collecting blood samples in Hoosick Falls in February, more than 18 months after the hazardous chemical was discovered in the village's water supply by a resident, Michael Hickey. More than 2,000 blood samples were collected since the testing began.

Similar blood-sampling tests are being conducted in communities in Vermont and New Hampshire, where PFOA was detected in water supplies as a result of environmental investigations spurred by the widely reported discovery of PFOA in the Hoosick Falls' public water system.

State and federal investigations of the contamination are ongoing.

Thousands of people whose blood was tested in the Ohio Valley area where the contamination has resulted in a class-action lawsuit had elevated levels of PFOA, including at levels as high as 40 parts per billion.

In February, the state Department of Environmental Conservation asked Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics and Honeywell International, which formerly owned the McCaffrey Street plant, to accept consent orders that would require them to clean up the remnants of the toxic chemical that polluted water supplies in and around Hoosick Falls.

Saint-Gobain operates two plants in Hoosick Falls, including a McCaffrey Street facility the

company has owned since 1999. The McCaffrey Street plant is a few hundred yards from the village's water-treatment plant and has been a focus of the contamination.

PFOA has been used since the 1940s to make products such as nonstick coatings and heat-resistant wiring.